



# VIJÑĀNA- BHAIRAVA- TANTRA

A NEW TRANSLATION OF THE 1200 YEAR  
OLD CLASSIC YOGA TEXT

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## A translation of the *Vijñāna-bhairava-tantra*

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Introductory verses (*maṅgala-śloka*):

“Shiva is also known as ‘Bhairava’ because He brings about the [initial awakening that makes us] cry out in fear of remaining in the dreamstate (*bhava-bhaya*)—and due to that cry of longing he becomes manifest in the radiant domain of the heart, bestowing absence of fear (*abhaya*) for those who are terrified.

He is also known as Bhairava because he is the Lord of those who delight in his awesome roar (*bhīrava*), which signals the death of Death!

Being the Master of that flock of excellent Yogins who tire of fear and seek release, he is Bhairava—the Supreme, whose form is Consciousness (*vijñāna*). As the giver of nourishment, he extends his Power throughout the universe!”

~ the great master Rājānaka Kṣemarāja, c. 1020 CE

Like most Tantrik scriptures, the Kaula Trika text called “The Scripture of the Bhairava who is Consciousness” (*Vijñāna-bhairava-tantra*, c. 850 CE) takes the form of a dialogue between Śiva and Śakti, here called Bhairava and Bhairavī. It begins with the Goddess asking Bhairava (here I quote the Sanskrit only of the first verse):

*śrutam deva mayā sarvaṃ rudra-yāmala-saṃbhavam |*  
*trika-bhedam aśeṣeṇa sārāt sāra-vibhāgaśaḥ || 1 || . . .*

(1) “O Lord, I have heard the entire teaching of the Trika<sup>1</sup> that has arisen from our union, in scriptures of ever greater essentiality, (2) but even now my doubts have not yet dissolved, Parameśvara. What is the true nature of Reality, O Lord?

“Does it consist of the powers that inhere in the mass of phonemes (*śabda-rāśi*)?<sup>2</sup> (3) Or, amongst the terrifying forms of Bhairava, is it Navātman? Or is it the trinity of śaktis (Parā, Parāparā, and Aparā) that [also] constitute the three ‘heads’ of Triśirobhairava? (4) Or does it consist of the Resonance and the Point

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<sup>1</sup> See *Tantra Illuminated*, p. 235 and following.

<sup>2</sup> See *The Recognition Sūtras*, Chapter 20, Topic 2.

(*nāda* and *bindu*)?<sup>3</sup> Or the Half-moon and the Impeder?<sup>4</sup> Or the vowelless mantra-phoneme installed in the Circle?<sup>5</sup> Or is it [simply] Śakti [herself]?<sup>6</sup>

Bhairavī's question: What is the ultimate reality? Or what aspect of reality of most fundamental?

Possible answer #1: **śabdarāśi-kalā** ~ the powers represented by, and embodied in, the 50 phonemes of the Sanskrit alphabet. Example: the first three letters of the alphabet are *a*, *ā*, and *i*, representing and embodying the three most fundamental potencies (*śaktis*) of Consciousness: *a* = *anuttara-śakti*, the Power of Absolute Awareness (the ground of being), *ā* = *ānanda-śakti*, its inherent Power of Bliss, and *i* = *icchā-śakti*, the Power of Will or prediscursive urge toward self-expression and self-exploration.

In his commentary on the VBT, Kshemarāja gives these examples, following the teaching of his guru Abhinavagupta who expounds this topic of 'linguistic mysticism' at length in *Tantrasāra* chapter three (see my Patreon webinar on the topic). Kshemarāja says: "These *vimarśa-śaktis* or potencies that inhere within self-aware consciousness—*anuttara*, *ānanda*, *icchā* and so on—are universal pulsations of energy that comprise and encompass all signifiers and signifieds (words and what they denote). Since they are aspects of the power of self-awareness of the Bhairava-that-is-Consciousness (*bodha-bhairava*, = *vijñāna-bhairava*), they are intrinsic to reality—could then this 'power of the mass of sounds' be the Ultimate?"

Possible answer #2: **Navātman** aka **Navātma-bhairava** ~ this term refers to an esoteric Tantrik mantra with nine letters, and/or to a list of the nine most important *tattvas* (principles of reality) and/or to a particular form of Bhairava who was once very important in Tantra but is virtually forgotten today.

A brief history of Navātma-bhairava: he and his nine-letter mantra first appears in the earliest Tantrik scripture of all, the *Niśvāsa*, circa 550 CE. Next he appears in the earliest Trika scripture, the *Siddha-yogeśvari-mata-tantra* of 700 CE, where he is the highest deity "worshipped . . . in the heart of the assemblage of Vīras and Yoginīs known as the *Khecari-cakra* ['the Skywalker-assembly']." (Sanderson 1990: 75) In later Trika scriptures he is no longer the highest deity but now appears as the consort of one of the three Trika goddesses (for which see below), Aparā Devī (the Kālī-like goddess of the Trika). Finally he ends up as the consort of Kubjikā, the Tantrik goddess most associated with *kundalinī* and the *cakras*. This

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<sup>3</sup> For *bindu*, see verses 36-7 below; for *nāda*, see verses 38-42.

<sup>4</sup> These are esoteric levels of mantric resonance, the Half-moon being the subtler of two phases of the pure nasal (*anusvāra*) of the *bīja*, and the Impeder being the psychic blockage above the hard palate that is eventually pierced by *uccāra* practice (see verse 39 below).

<sup>5</sup> See practice #5 in Chapter 18 of *The Recognition Sutras*.

<sup>6</sup> Sanderson takes this as a reference to Kālī Kālasaṅkarṣiṇī / Mātṛsadbhāva.

phase of Navātman’s career became an important one, because even though he was usually subordinate to Kubjikā, in a South Indian lineage known as the Śāmbhavānanda lineage he was venerated as the main deity, and it is precisely this lineage that was key in the 13th-century transition from Tantrik Yoga to Hatha-yoga (see the work of Csaba Kiss on this topic).

In his commentary on the VBT, Kshemarāja stresses the fact that Navātman is an embodiment of nine crucial *tattvas*: those of materiality (*prakṛti*), soul (*purusa*), causality (*niyati*), time (*kāla*), the creative power that manifests the universe (*māyā*, which does \*not\* mean illusion or delusion in this system), liberative insight (*vidyā*), and three aspects of Divine Consciousness (Īśa, Sadāśiva, and Śiva), and proposes that “As he is the essence of that king of mantras, the Navātman, through which one reflects on reality in the form of nine *tattvas*, [Bhairavī wonders] could he/that be the Ultimate?”

Possible answer #3: **the Triad of Powers** (*śakti-traya*) ~ the three Goddesses of the Trika lineage, who also constitute the three aspects of the deity Triśirobhairava (venerated in a long-gone branch of the Trika). Kshemarāja clarifies that “the Triad of Powers” also refers to three mantras that correspond both to the three goddesses and to Shiva, Shakti, and Nara (the individual soul), which together constitute the whole of reality.

As detailed in *Tantra Illuminated*, the three goddesses are associated with several triads that constitute key teachings in Śaiva Tantra:

Parā	Parāparā	Aparā
icchā-śakti (willing)	jñāna-śakti (knowing)	kriyā-śakti (acting)
sṛṣṭi (creation)	sthiti (stasis)	samhāra (dissolution)
pramātā (Knower)	pramāṇa (knowing)	premeya (known)
abheda (nonduality)	bhedābheda (unity-in-diversity)	bheda (duality)
Śiva	Śakti	Nara (individuality)

Possible answer #4: **the Resonance & the Point** (*nāda* and *bindu*) ~ as Kshemarāja explains, *bindu* is the point of ultimacy, the singularity, that which manifests as the Light of Creation / Light of Consciousness (*prakāśa*), which diversifies into the whole universe of phenomena that words can denote *and* which is the universal potency within all mantras. *nāda*, then, is the fundamental sonic resonance made possible by the self-reflective capacity of Consciousness, which expresses as the totality of all words and mantras. (so *bindu* = *prakāśa* -> *vācya*, and *nāda* = *vimarśa* -> *vācaka*)

Possible answer #5: **the Crescent-moon and the Impeder** (*ardhacandra* & *nirodhika*) ~ levels of *uccāra* (a specific kind of mantra practice), these occur immediately after the *anusvāra* and are situated at the level of the third eye and just above it respectively

Possible answer #6: the vowelless mantra-phoneme installed in the Circle (*cakrārūḍham anackam*) ~ see *The Recognition Sutras*, Chapter 18, practice #5

Possible answer #7: **Shakti herself** (*śakti-svarūpaka*) ~

*Bhairavī continues:*

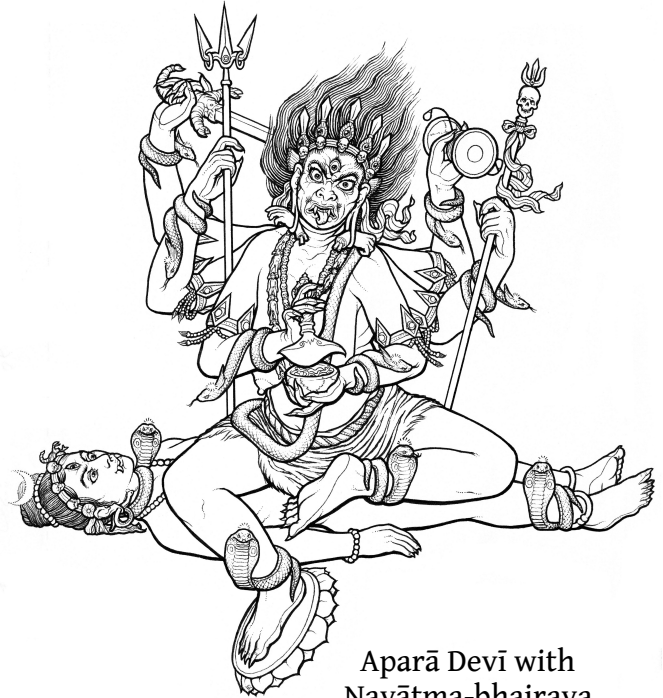
(5) “And another point: if the Supreme Goddess (Parā Devī) is [to be visualized] with attributes, [that is, anthropomorphically,] like Parāparā and Aparā, then her supremacy (*paratva*) would be contradicted.<sup>7</sup>

(6) “Nor [could she be supreme if she must be visualized] as having this color as opposed to that, or this form as opposed to that; supremacy is [properly associated] with formlessness, not with a specific form.

(7a) O Lord & husband, be gracious to me & make me clear: cut away my doubts completely!”

[To which] Bhairava said:

(7b) “Bravo! Bravo, my dear one. You have asked about the very essence of the Tantra(s).



Aparā Devī with  
Navātma-bhairava

(8) “I shall relate this most hidden of teachings to you, virtuous one. Know that the embodied forms of Bhairava I have taught in the scriptures (9) are not the real essence, O Goddess. They are like a magic trick, like dreams or illusions or castles in the sky, (10) taught only to help focus the meditation of those who are debilitated by dualistic thought, their minds confused, entangled in the details of ritual action. (11) In reality, [the true nature of] Bhairava is not Navātman, nor the mystic alphabet (*śabda-rāśi*), nor the trinity of *śaktis*, nor the three-headed one (Triśirobhairava), (12) nor does it consist of the Resonance and the Point, nor the Half-moon and the Impeder, nor that which is combined with the sequence of the Circle, nor [simply] Śakti [herself]. (13) These were

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<sup>7</sup> Bhairavī argues that if Parā, the Supreme Goddess of the Trika, is to be visualized with a particular color, form, etc., then she cannot really be Absolute or Supreme (*para*).

taught to help unawakened people make progress on the path, like a mother uses sweets and threats to influence her children's behavior.<sup>8</sup>

14. "Beyond reckoning in space or time;  
without direction or locality;  
impossible to represent;  
ultimately indescribable;
15. Blissful with the experience of that which is inmost;  
a field of awareness free of mental constructs:  
*that* state of overflowing fullness is Bhairavī, the essence of Bhairava.
- 16a. It is *that* essence which is ultimately real & fundamental;  
it is *that* which ought to be known & experienced;  
it is that which is inherently pure, and  
it is that which pervades everything."

*Alternate translation of the same four-and-a-half verses:*

(14-16a) "Know that in reality, the one pure universe-filling 'form' of Bhairava is that absolutely full state of being called Goddess Bhairavī: it is beyond reckoning in space or time, without direction or locality, impossible to represent, ultimately indescribable, a field free of mental constructs, blissful with the experience of that which is innermost (*antaḥsvānubhavānandā*).

(16b) "When this is the ultimate Reality, who is to be worshipped, and who gratified? (17) This state of Bhairava [called Bhairavī] is taught as supreme; it is proclaimed to be Parā Devī in her ultimate (*para*) nature.

In other words, the absolutely full state of consciousness (*bharitākārā avasthā*) which Bhairava describes as 'the Goddess' is a joyously expanded field of awareness free of mental filters or projections; it is the opening to and welcoming in of the whole of the present moment without conditions; it is the granting of the heart's consent to the moment as it is, releasing mental fantasies of how it could or should be; and it is the feeling of deep connection and presence that comes from surrendering into true intimacy with the qualia of reality as they offers themselves and permeate awareness in the *now*. In this state, one's innermost being (*antaḥsva*) is revealed as it really is: permeating the whole of reality (*viśva-pūraṇa*) and filled with the joy of experiencing what is (*anubhavānanda*). Sanderson comments, "It is this state of fullness, this complete centeredness in the . . . essence of consciousness, rather than the composite images or mantras of ritual, that the Trika scriptures really mean when they speak of the Goddess Parā."

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<sup>8</sup> I am indebted to my teacher Alexis Sanderson for proposing a reading that makes sense out of the problematic grammar of verse 13.

The radical nature of this revelation of the nature of the Goddess can only be appreciated through familiarity with the cultural context of the time, in which revelations of ever more esoteric deities was largely a game of sectarian one-upmanship. Here, a plethora of complex ritual forms and injunctions is at once done away with in a profound reframing of the purpose of spiritual practice: when we access the state of inner fullness, the state of liberated and expanded awareness, we are engaged in the highest worship possible (see also verse 147 below). This teaching became popular later in the tradition and is still taught today, but in the year 850, it was unheard of. It was a revelation.



Parā Devī, Supreme  
Goddess of the Trika,  
with Bhairavasadbhāva

Bhairava goes on to explain the relationship between Śiva and Śakti:

There is never the slightest separation between Śakti and her Host (i.e. Śiva); thus, because there can be no separation between a quality and that in which it inheres, the Power (*śakti*) of the Supreme Being is itself Supreme (*parā*). || 18

In other words, Shakti is Shiva's equal. Energy and awareness ~ form and formlessness ~ all fluxing phenomena and the space which hosts those phenomena: Shakti and Shiva are inseparable interdependent expressions of each other. Each cannot exist without the other. They are 'married' to each other throughout all time and space.

The power of fire to burn cannot be considered as separate from the fire itself. Śakti is only considered separate initially [as a teaching tool], to aid our entry into the state of wisdom-being (*jñāna-sattā*). || 19

In our way [i.e. the Kaula way<sup>9</sup>], Śiva's *śakti* is said to be the entryway [into Śiva]. The meditative contemplation of one who enters into the *śakti*-state [as described below] becomes nondual. When one's experience of being becomes undivided in this way, one is Śiva himself. || 20

Even though the text has already posited Shakti as the very essence (*ātman*) of Shiva, She is also the gateway, because we can only realize the true nature of the whole of reality by penetrating to its very heart.

<sup>9</sup> See *Tantra Illuminated*, p. 204.

Just as different directions of any given space are known through the light of a lamp or the rays of the sun, in the same way Śiva is known through Śakti, O beloved. || 21

Without Shakti, there would be nothing but formless potential, like empty space. Like the light of a lamp makes the objects in a room manifest to perception, the energy of Shakti gives form and definition to what would otherwise be formless. Since the formless open empty Ground of Being (i.e., Shiva) is impossible to grasp with the mind, we need to access it through the forms of energy which illuminate it and provide vectors into the direct experience of it.

*The blessed Goddess said:*

“O God of gods whose symbol is the trident and whose ornaments are made from human skulls: this state of fullness of the Divine<sup>10</sup>—free of time, space, or locality, and impossible to represent conceptually—by what means is it attained? And how does the Supreme Goddess (*Parā Devī*) become the gateway into That? Answer me this in such a way that I can completely understand it, O Bhairava!” || 22-23

Bhairava’s reply consists of more than 100 techniques, practices, and contemplations that form the bulk of the scripture (vv. 24-136). Though the ordering of these practices (*yuktis*) sometimes appears random, the reader who takes a step back can discern thematic patterns that are occasionally interrupted by seemingly random verses that don’t fit the pattern. These thematic patterns, roughly, appear in this order: breath practices, kundalinī and subtle body practices, esoteric yoga practices (*bindu*, *nāda*, *uccāra*, etc.), emptiness/spaciousness practices, traditional tantrik yoga practices, daily life practices, contemplative practices, and ‘becoming one with Bhairava’ practices.

## BREATH PRACTICES

### YUKTI #1 (*visarga* or breath:pause practice)

The Supreme Goddess constantly articulates (*uccaret*) as the life-giving flow of breath: *prāṇa* (exhale) rising up, and *jīva* (inhale)—the movement into embodiment—descending. By pausing<sup>11</sup> at the two places where they arise, and filling<sup>11</sup> those points [with silent awareness], one abides in the state of inner fullness (*bharitā*). || 24

The practice here is simple, even though the language of the verse is esoteric. We are to pause between the breaths and abide in stillness for a moment or two, with awareness gently focused either at the heart (for the pause after inhale) or above the head (for the pause after exhale). Though the practice is simple enough, the Sanskrit of the verse poses a fascinating challenge for the translator, because it is impossible to render it

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<sup>10</sup> Lit., “this state which is the fullness-aspect (fem.) of Bhairava.”

<sup>11</sup> The Sanskrit word translated as ‘pausing’ (*bharaṇa*) also means ‘maintaining, supporting, filling, nourishing’, and is cognate with *Bhairava*.



correctly without knowing the technical terminology of Śaiva Tantra. The verse uses three technical terms. In this system, *jīva* means both the inhale and the movement into embodiment. *Uccaret* means both to breathe *and* to enunciate, specifically to utter a mantra in sync with the breath. (This is a usage not found in the dictionaries, since it is specific to Śaiva Tantra.) Thus by using this verb the text's author implies that we can join a mantra to the breath in this practice. It must be a two-syllable mantra, so the most likely candidates are *so'ham* and/or *haṃsa*, with one syllable on each breath. (In either case, *ham* is to be silently articulated/felt on the inhale, and *so* or *sa* on the exhale.) Finally, *visarga*, here translated as 'life-giving flow of breath', is also a technical term in the tradition, meaning 'emission', 'creative power', and 'absolute potential flowing forth into manifestation'. The symbol for *visarga* is : (two dots stacked vertically), so the author of the text is doing something very clever here: he is subtly suggesting the *visarga* as a visual representation of the spatial awareness we cultivate in the practice (the lower dot corresponding to the base of the heart, and the upper dot to the *dvādaśānta*, the upper limit of the energy body, about three fists above your head).

So when the text's author tells us that the Supreme Goddess is the *visarga* (for this is the literal meaning of 24b), he is telling us that She is the Absolute Potential that flows forth into manifestation as the breath itself, and that we can realize Her through reposing momentarily in the space between the breaths, and filling that space with silent awareness. How do we 'fill' the space? The commentator Śivopādhyāya says we should cultivate focused awareness of Bhairava's *śakti* as the ever-unfolding primordial vibration that is subtly discernable when the movement of breath and mind comes to rest for a moment. Thus, each of the spaces between the breaths is realized as a kind of 'pregnant pause' full of potential for embodiment (at the end of the exhale) and for surrender (at the end of the inhale).

**O Bhairavī! By not turning back [too soon] from the pair of spaces, inner and outer, where the breath pauses, the form of Bhairava is manifested thus through Bhairavī (= the still space of awareness underlying the movement of *prāṇa* is revealed). || 25**

The 'pair of spaces' refers to the two points mentioned in the previous verse: that from which the inhale begins (which is above the head) and that from which the exhale begins (at the base of the heart). The inside of the body is here visualized as open space, mirroring the outside. One is invited to pause at the end of each inhale and exhale and experience the spaciousness of pure awareness (the "form of Bhairava").

In fact, this is not a second *yukti*, but rather a further comment on Yukti #1, because the exact same practice is referred to. I find other instances where two or more verses are needed to explain a single practice as well (e.g., verses 56 & 57). This seems to undermine the text's claim to teach 112 methods—or perhaps that claim is simply to offer 112 teachings (*upadeśas*, see verse 139), and has been misinterpreted by previous translators.

## YUKTI #1b

When the prāṇa-śakti does not move out nor enters in, the Center [suddenly] expands and thoughts melt away. By virtue of that, one is endowed with the Bhairava-state.<sup>12</sup> || 26

It is an open question whether or not this verse is giving further commentary on Yukti #1, introduced in verse 24, or whether it is describing a spontaneous experience that results from assiduous practice of Yukti #1. Scholar-practitioner Paul Muller-Ortega has argued that many of the ‘methods’ of the VBT have to be understood as spontaneously arising experiences on the path of awakened meditation. This verse (and a few others) seems to support that argument; it can be read as alluding to an experience that occurs in meditation where the breath gets subtler and subtler, moving closer to the most intimate core of one’s being, until it spontaneously stops, along with the mind’s ideation, triggering the expansion of the Center (which denotes both the central channel and the core of one’s being as awareness-presence) and unveiling the ‘Bhairava-state’. The latter is an experience of profoundly still emptiness that is paradoxically filled with the quiet intensity of pure Presence.<sup>13</sup>

When that [breath-power] called ‘quiescent’ is retained after inhale or even after exhale, at the end of that [moment of stillness], the Tranquil One [Śiva] manifests through that power. || 27

This verse too is open to interpretation, but I understand it to be another subtle variation on Yukti #1. The use of the word ‘retained’ (kumbhita) would seem to imply some conscious effort in breath retention, in contrast with the spontaneity implied in the previous verse. Since the practice here is simply pausing between the breaths, there is nothing to distinguish it from Yukti #1, though one could read ‘kumbhita’ as instructing us to hold the breath still for longer than we did when following the instructions of verses 24-25.

On the other hand, the verse may be referring to involuntary/spontaneous *kumbhaka*, such as when the diaphragm suddenly (and sometimes forcibly) moves down of its own accord, creating a deep inhale, then a pause. This generally happens only to experienced meditators with awakened *kuṇḍalinī*.

At any rate, even though there are subtle variances between the descriptions in verses 24-25, 25, and 27, they are not significant enough to call them separate and distinct Yuktis. For the time being, at least, I designate all four verses as Yukti #1.

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<sup>12</sup> Going with the alternate reading *bhairavarūpadhṛt* cited by Jayaratha ad TĀ 5.22.

<sup>13</sup> The Recognition Sūtras, sūtra 17, constitutes a parallel passage to this verse, for it describes the expansion of the Center. Furthermore, VBT commentator Śivopādhyāya explicitly links verse 26 to the Bhairava-mudrā (aka Śāmbhavī Mudrā), for which see The Recognition Sūtras, Chapter 18, Practice #3.

## KUṆḌALINĪ & SUBTLE BODY PRACTICES

### YUKTI #2

Imagine the subtlest possible form [of *prāṇa*] as rays of light shining upward from the root [of the central channel] and peacefully dissolving in the highest center above the crown; then Bhairava (spacious awareness) arises. || 28

This verse seems to suggest *kuṇḍalinī* (the “subtlest possible form” of *prāṇa*) but doesn’t use the term (since the VBT predates its usage in any sense other than “inner mantric power”—see verse 154). The “highest center” mentioned here is again that of the *dvādaśānta*, three fists (or twelve finger widths) above the crown. See below.

### YUKTI #3

Imagine the *śakti* rising like a streak of lightning from one subtle center (*cakra*) to the next in succession. When She reaches the upper[most] center, three fists above the crown, there comes the Great Dawn of liberation [and prosperity]. || 29

The word *mahodaya* literally means ‘great dawn’ or ‘great arising’, but in Sanskrit literature is frequently used to suggest the dawn of an era of good fortune and prosperity or of personal liberation.

### YUKTI #4

There are twelve [such centers] in sequence; properly associated with twelve vowels. By fixing awareness on each one, in successively coarse, subtle, and supreme forms, and then abandoning each, in the end, [one knows] God. || 30

Yukti #4 is another example of a practice that cannot be understood from the verse alone: one must consult the Sanskrit commentaries and living teachers with lineage transmission.

We can see here that the VBT has a twelve-chakra system in mind, different from the seven-chakra system familiar to Western practitioners. These twelve, arrayed along the central channel (*sushumnā nāḍī*) extend from the perineum to the center above the crown of the head (probably the twelve are the *cakras* of the pelvic floor, genitals, *kanda*, navel, heart, throat, palate, eyebrow-center, forehead, crown, *śakti*, and *vyāpinī*). They are associated with twelve Sanskrit vowels: a, ā, i, ī, u, ū, e, ai, o, au, aṃ, aḥ. In the first (‘coarse’) iteration, one should visualise each *cakra* intently and intone the vowel associated with it (this is a *dhyāna* practice). In the second or subtle iteration, you seek to feel the subtle resonance of that vowel sound internally, vibrating in the appropriate *cakra* (this

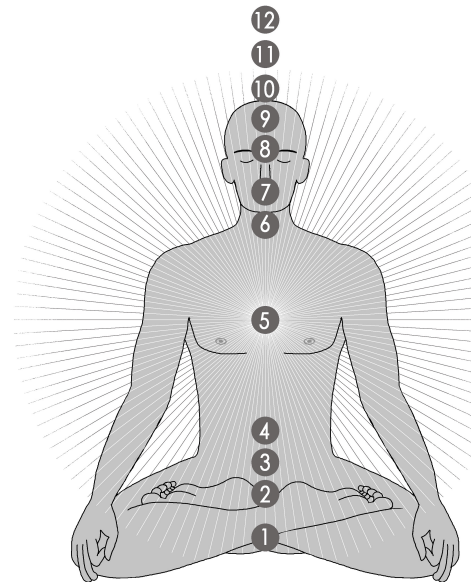


Image by Carmen Melton

is a *spanda* practice). The third or ‘supreme’ iteration is secret (essentially, the sound vibration synaesthetically converts into light).

#### YUKTI #5

Having quickly filled the body up to the head with that energy,<sup>14</sup> and having breached [the knot of *māyā* aka *rudra-granthi*] with the ‘bridge’ of concentration between the eyebrows, [and] having freed the mind from its thought-entrancement, one ascends to the all-pervasive state (*vyāpinī*) in the [place] above all. || 31

This is another verse which requires learned commentary to understand. The commentator identifies this Yukti as a form of *khecari mudrā*, which originally referred to the rise of *kuṇḍalinī* to the crown of the head. The level of *vyāpinī*, the twelfth and highest subtle center in this system, is referred to by an allusive synonym (*sarvaga*-, ‘all-pervasive’). But a difficulty remains; are we to understand *setu* as ‘bridge’ or ‘dike’? Is the metaphor one of breaching a dike and thereby opening a channel to allow the *prāṇa-śakti* to flow through? That would make the most sense to me, but the grammar has “breach (or break through) *with* the *setu*” and one can’t breach with a dike. And perhaps this ‘yukti’ is again not so much a practice as a description of what can happen when *kuṇḍalinī* has been awakened. If it is a practice, then perhaps all that is required, assuming one has successfully filled the whole body with *prāṇa-śakti*, is the firm and focused intent to penetrate the inner psychic knot that blocks access to the upper realms (signified by the four *cakras* above the eyebrow-center).

### ESOTERIC PRACTICES

#### YUKTI #6

Meditating on the Five Spaces as the colorful circles of the peacock’s feathers, one enters the Heart, the Supreme Space. || 32

This verse also needs careful explanation—and that’s where it gets tricky, because no one knows for sure the practice intended by the author here. In looking at Śivopādhyāya’s Sanskrit commentary, I saw that Jaidev Singh misunderstood it, so no help is forthcoming from him. After some contemplation (both grammatical and spiritual), I think I have a sense of what the author is talking about here. Firstly, the five sense apertures (here eyes count as one, because the two eyes sum their visual data, nose counts as one, ears count as two, plus mouth = five) are commonly called ‘spaces’ (*śūnya*) and sometimes ‘circles’ (*maṇḍala*)—but they are separate, while the five circles of the peacock’s feather are nested one inside the other. This is the key to the verse. Since we are instructed to meditate on the sense-apertures as the circles on the



<sup>14</sup> Meaning *prāṇa-śakti* or *mātrkā-śakti*??

peacock's feathers (a point missed by all available translations), that clearly implies that we should allow the sense-fields to *merge*. The idea may be to intentionally nest the subtler sense-energies inside the coarser ones (i.e., sound-sense nested inside touch-sense inside visual-sense inside taste inside smell)—or perhaps that level of detail is not intended here, and you are simply supposed to let them all merge into a single sensual field, as if you had a single sense-aperture. Then, the verse suggests, all phenomena within the sense-field are to be perceived as vibrations within vast emptiness (the 'Supreme Space'), decorating it (*citra-rūpa*) without disturbing it. All the sense-objects dissolve into the space at the innermost Heart or center of the merged sense-maṇḍala, and that of course is pure Being, Awareness itself (= Bhairava).

Now, at the center of the nested circles of the peacock's feather, you see an incredible iridescent yet dark cobalt blue, and probably not coincidentally, this is the traditional color of Anuttara Śiva, absolute consciousness. The verse explicitly says that through this meditation, one enters the *anuttara śūnya*, the Supreme Space, the absolute Heart. As far as I know, no one has noticed this correspondence yet.

Having said all this, the five spaces could also refer to five *cakras*, in which case the practice here is to merge them into one center (as in *Tantrāloka* chapter 29) and thereby enter the absolute center, the Heart. But to have a five-*cakra* system implied immediately after the text has established a twelve-*cakra* system seems unlikely.

#### YUKTI #7

By this very same process, whatever [substrate causes] one's thinking-mind to spontaneously dissolve—whether an [inner] space, a [blank] wall, or a perfectly shaped vessel—such dissolution bestows the boon [of the Bhairava-state]. || 33

REVISE: What is meant by the phrase “by this very same process”? Grammatically, we would expect it to refer back to the previous verse, so perhaps it simply refers to letting awareness become increasingly subtle and increasingly interiorized, whether it is focused on an open space, blank wall, or empty vessel. Note the Zen-like quality of the practice here—and this is around the same time as the beginning of Zen.

I think *para-pātra* is to be taken literally, as a referring to a well-formed bowl or vessel, and not, as the commentators take it, metaphorically, in the sense of “a worthy disciple”. However, the latter reading shows that the commentators understand this text as a manual for a guru.



#### YUKTI #8

Remaining with eyes closed, fix your attention inside the cranium (*kapāla*); by means of gradually increasing steadiness of mind, you will perceive that which is most worthy of being perceived. || 34

This verse intends the yogi to focus attention inside his or her own living skull, not a skull-bowl in front of her; but the use of the word *kapāla*, in the original context, would

certainly have called to the reader's mind skull-bowls used by Kāpālīka yogins as drinking vessels, and in that way the verse is a reminder of mortality. As far as the Kāpālīkas (who flourished in the ninth century) were concerned, if you can't hold a human skull-bowl in your hand and drink from it reverently, you're in denial about your own death and/or about the divine beauty of death.



#### SUBTLE BODY PRACTICES CONTINUED

##### YUKTI #9

The central channel is situated in the core [of one's being]. Visualize it as having a form like a slender lotus fiber, and meditate on it as being the Goddess in the form of the innermost Space; through Her, [the experience of] God will manifest. || 35

Cf. Yukti #2, verse 28. This is the second yukti involving the central channel.

#### ESOTERIC YOGIC PRACTICES: BINDU, NĀDA, UCCĀRA

Verses 36-42 describe esoteric yogic practices involving *nāda* and *bindu*, inner experiences of sound and light. I would argue that the implicit view of the text's author is that the apparently more accessible practices we see in the middle of the text only actually move us closer to awakeness and liberation (*bodha* and *moksha*) if these deeply interiorized yogic practices are mastered first. In other words, these yogic practices are prerequisites to successfully engaging the blissful and sensual practices we get later. In other words, without activating, opening up, and priming the energy-body as described above and below (through verse 64), anyone attempting the practices described in verses 68-74 is simply eating, drinking, listening to music, and having sex, and *calling* it Tantrik Yoga.

##### YUKTI #10

[If the yogī] closes the doors [of the senses] with the 'weapon' by which [external] perception is blocked with the [assistance of the] hands, [and] pierces the eyebrow-center, he will [eventually] perceive the Bindu. When it dissolves, [one will experience the state of] Supreme Stasis in one's Center. || 36

This verse is probably referring to *ṣaṇmukhī mudrā* (see image), but other interpretations have been offered as well. SEE Svachchandantra 4.438–39ab



##### YUKTI #11

Meditate on the Bindu as a *tilak* (💧) of subtle fire produced by the inner stimulation of the Radiant Abode (*dhāman*), visualizing it in the heart or just above the head; when it dissolves, there is dissolution [into pure Presence]. || 37

YUKTI #12

One who is steeped in the Brahman-that-is-sound, in the uninterrupted Unstruck [Sound], [like] a rushing river in the vessel of the ear, attains supreme Brahman. || 38

YUKTI #13

O Goddess, by performing complete *uccāra* of the *praṇava* and meditating on the void at the end of its protracted/saturated sound, one enters into the Spacious Openness by means of the void which is the Supreme Power (*parā śakti*). || 39

This verse offers another example of a very specific yogic practice important to the tradition but unknown to most translators. The verse clearly alludes to the central Tantrik practice of *uccāra*, in which the yogī repeatedly devotes a prolonged exhale to a single-syllable mantra (a *praṇava* or *bīja*) such as OM or HAUM. Specific techniques are involved with this practice, and the scripture is not innovating when it invites the practitioner to meditate on the silence immediately following the protracted sound of the mantra: this is part of the traditional technique. Through this meditation, we are told, the yogī attains perfect emptiness/spaciousness/openness (*śūnyatā*) by means of the subtle silent space after the enunciation of the mantra, which is here (and in the science of *nāda* as well) associated with Parā Śakti.

EMPTINESS/SPACIOUSNESS PRACTICES

Verses 40-51 (excepting 42) focus on various kinds of meditation on the Void (*śūnya* or *vyoma*), especially within one's own body. These Śiva-centered practices may also be seen as prerequisites to the sensual practices that follow. Note that the first two practices ease us into the realm of the Void by having us focus on it in relation to adjacent sound.

YUKTI #14

A person who fosters the [subtle] experience/perception of the very beginning and ending of any syllable, sound, or musical note (*varṇa*), becomes, by means of the feminine void (*śūnyā*), empty, open, & spacious (*śūnya*), his very form [nothing but] that spaciousness. || 40



YUKTI #15

One whose heart-mind is completely focused on the prolonged sounds of a musical instrument such as a *tantrī* (a stringed instrument like a *vīṇā*), through the duration of the phases [of their resonance], at the limit [of the perceptible sound], one's beautiful form becomes that of the [formless] supreme Void (*vyoma*). || 41

YUKTI #16

Through internal enunciation of an entire *piṇḍa-mantra* in accordance with the sequence of its articulable letters, [followed by] the Half-moon, the Point, the Resonance, the End of Resonance, and the Void, one becomes Shiva. || 42

YUKTI #17

One may contemplate Space/Sky (*viyat*) in all directions within one's own body simultaneously. [Through this meditation,] the mind becomes free of dichotomizing beliefs and everything becomes spacious. || 43

YUKTI #18

One should meditate upon the space above [at the crown of the head] and the space in the root [of the body] simultaneously. Through the Power that is independent of the body, one's mind will become empty & spacious (*śūnya*). || 44

YUKTI #19

One should steadily contemplate the space above, the space in the root, and the space in the heart simultaneously. [In this process,] one becomes free of dichotomizing beliefs, due to which the unconstructed (*nirvikalpa*) state arises. || 45

YUKTI #20

In any given moment, one may consider/contemplate any part of the body as if it were pure Emptiness/Spaciousness (*śūnyatā*), without thinking about it. One who becomes free of dichotomizing beliefs [in this way] directly senses & participates in (*-bhāḥ*) their unconstructed essence-nature. || 46



YUKTI #21

O doe-eyed woman, one may imagine that all the tissues of the body are pervaded by Space; through this [practice], one's meditation will become stable & steady. || 47

Perhaps the *dravyas* (bodily tissues) here refers to the Āyurvedic *dhātus* (namely hair, skin, muscle, blood, fat, bone, marrow, and reproductive fluid), in which case one should contemplate each of these in sequence as nothing but Space. Alternatively, the nine *dravyas* of the Nyāya tradition (which was related to the Śaiva tradition) could be intended here: they are Earth, Water, Fire, Wind, Space, Time, Extension/Direction, Soul, and Mind.

YUKTI #22

One may imagine that the 'dividing wall' of skin is [merely] a screen, within which there is nothing; meditating [in this way], one directly senses that which can never be an object of meditation. || 48

YUKTI #23

With one's sense-faculties dissolved in the space of the Heart—in the innermost recess of the Lotus—with one's attention on nothing else: O blessed Lady, one will obtain supreme blessedness. || 49

YUKTI #24

[Or,] completely dissolve the mind in the upper limit of one's [subtle] body [above the head]; through this practice, one of steady mind steadily attains that Reality which is the goal. || 50

YUKTI #24b

Wherever you may be, whatever you may be doing, you may cast your attention to the *dvādaśānta* moment-to-moment (/in any given moment). As mental agitation dies away, something indescribable may occur within days. || 51

CLASSICAL TANTRIK YOGA PRACTICES

The emptiness practices are followed by more yogic practices, such as *deha-śuddhi* (verse 52), *tattva-śuddhi* (verse 54), and the various forms of *adhva-prakriyā* (verses 56-7):

YUKTI #25

One may imagine that one's own body is incinerated by the Fire of Time rising from the feet; at the end [of this process] there is the radiant shining of pure tranquillity. || 52

YUKTI #26

In the same way, imagining the whole world incinerated [by fire], a person of disciplined mind experiences the supreme state of the soul. || 53

YUKTI #27

Meditating on the Principles of Reality (*tattvas*) dissolving, each more subtle than the last, in one's own body or in the world, the Supreme Goddess (*parā*) manifests in the end. || 54

YUKTI #28

Having meditated on the *śakti* as thick and [then] weak in the region of the *dvādaśānta*, [and then] entering into the Heart and meditating [on it], one attains freedom in one's dreams.<sup>15</sup> || 55

YUKTI #29

One may contemplate the Path of Worlds or [any of the other Paths] completely in proper sequence: through stabilizing [this contemplation] in coarse, subtle, and supreme forms, in the end the mind dissolves [into the Absolute]. || 56

Thoroughly meditating on the *adhva-prakriyā*, up to the limits of this entire universe, then on the Śaiva Tattva, there comes the Great Dawn of liberation (cf. v. 29). || 57

MORE EMPTINESS/SPACIOUSNESS PRACTICES

O great Goddess, one may consider this universe as Empty Void (*śūnya*); the mind dissolves in that very [Emptiness], then one shares in its dissolution (or: becomes a worthy vessel of its dissolution). || 58

One may cast one's gaze into a well-formed vessel, such as a pot or the like, [and] leaving aside its walls, [become absorbed in the space it encloses]. At the very moment [the mind] dissolves into that [space], one becomes of the same nature as [the spacious open awareness-presence that is] Bhairava. || 59

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<sup>15</sup> i.e., lucid dreaming. Or, if we follow the alternate reading of *muktaH* for *svapna-*, then the translation would be: "the liberated one attains absolute Freedom."

One may cast one's gaze on an area free of trees, mountains, walls, and so on; when the mental state dissolves into [that open field], then arises the state of being in which mental-emotional churning/activity (*vr̥tti-*) is feeble or absent. || 60

#33 Contemplating the cognition of any two entities (*bhāvas*) or any two states of mind or body (*bhāvas*), take refuge in the center [between them] & rest in the center. Releasing both simultaneously, Reality shines in the Center. || 61

When any mental-emotional state or mood (*bhāva*) has been released, let awareness be checked: do not move on to another *bhāva* [right away]. Then, through the felt sense (*bhāva*) of one's Center, a deeper contemplation (*atibhāvanā*) [of one's essence-nature] expands & blossoms. || 62

One may contemplate [the Truth] that one's entire body, or indeed the whole world, consists of [nothing but] Consciousness. Through the nonconceptual-mind [directly seeing this truth] all at once, there comes the Supreme Dawning [of liberation]. || 63

#### A TRADITIONAL TANTRIK YOGA PRACTICE

Due to the dynamic tension (*sanghaṭṭa*) of the two *prāṇas*, either externally or internally, at the termination [of the breath-pause] the yogī becomes a vessel for the arising of equality-consciousness. || 64

Verse 64 is a stand-alone verse on an esoteric yogic practice utilizing the *prāṇa*. Then, with verse 65, we transition to a section of meditations on bliss (*ānanda*) and happiness (*sukha*). Perhaps the practice in verse 64 is a prerequisite to successfully perform the bliss practices? I believe that may be intended. At any rate, as already stated, the practices below can only be considered *spiritual* practices (ones that move you toward liberation) if the practitioner has an activated energy-body, for which at least some of the yogic practices mentioned above are necessary.

#### BLISS PRACTICES

Meditate on your own body, or the whole world, as full of your innate joy. Through that inner 'nectar', you will suddenly experience sublime bliss. || 65

O doe-eyed woman, by applying the 'hypocritical method', great joy suddenly arises, through which reality is revealed. || 66

This is another example of a verse that cannot be understood without reference to the commentaries.

Even in this section of the text on blissful experiences, we find a seemingly out-of-place verse about deeply interiorized yogic meditation:

The practitioner who stops all the streams of *prāṇa-śakti* [from flowing out through the senses and orifices] will experience it [enter the central channel and] slowly rise upward. In time he will experience a sensation [like the crawling] of ants [on his skin]; then supreme happiness (/pleasure) manifests. || 67

This verse clearly describes the sometimes strange somatic experiences that come with prolonged meditation and sensory deprivation. The additions I have made in brackets are not speculative; they supply information commonly found in parallel sources. This is why to translate correctly one needs to have read the relevant literature, most of which exists only in Sanskrit. Now back to the bliss practices.

This mysterious verse, on a practice utilizing sexual energy, took me literally years to decode:

One may cast one's heart-mind (= attention), full of pleasure, into the center [point] between the 'fire' [at the root] and the 'poison' [at the tip] with either *kevala-kumbhaka* or *pūraka-kumbhaka*;<sup>16</sup> thus one is connected to the bliss of [sexual] love. || 68

The cryptic language of this verse is explained in detail in Chapter Eighteen of my new book, *The Recognition Sūtras*, because it is quoted there by Kṣemarāja.

The stimulation caused by union with the consecrated female partner (*śakti*) gives rise to a pleasure which culminates in immersion into [pure] Energy (*śakti*);<sup>17</sup> that is the joy of the Principle of the Absolute (*brahman*) [itself]; [and] that is said to be the pleasure innate [to all humans]. || 69

O queen of the gods, even in the absence of a consort, by filling the mind with the memory of the joy of [being with] a woman, i.e. with [the memory of] licking, lovemaking, and [her] curves [?], one may become plunged in bliss. || 70

When you feel great joy, as when seeing a loved one after a long time, meditate on it. Let the mind dissolve into it; become one with it. || 71

One should meditate on the state of fullness that expands due to the delight of savoring good food and drink; and that joy will become sublime. || 72

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<sup>16</sup> OR: cast the mind/attention there with or without the aid of *prāṇa*-intensification; with would be the default.

<sup>17</sup> Or: 'possession' by the Goddess (*śaktyāveśa*).

The yogin who relishes music and song to the extent that s/he merges with it becomes filled with unparalleled happiness, attains heightened awareness, and experiences oneness with the Divine. || 73

Wherever the mind delights, let your attention linger there [in the felt sense of that rapture]. In any such experience, the true nature of supreme bliss may shine forth. || 74

#### DAILY LIFE PRACTICES

When the external sensory field has disappeared but sleep has not yet come, that [liminal] mental state is attainable in which the Supreme Goddess (Parā Devī) manifests. || 75

Let the gaze come to rest on a space that is dappled with the light of the sun or a lamp or suchlike; in that very [experience], the nature of one's innate being may manifest. || 76

Through *karankinī* [mudrā], through *krodhanā*, *bhairavī*, *lelihānā* or *khecarī mudrās*, at the time of perception, the supreme attainment manifests. || 77

Situating oneself on a soft seat, with only the buttocks touching it and the hands and feet suspended in the air, after remaining there [for some time], one's resolution & determination become completely fulfilled. || 78

Settling oneself on a seat properly and half-bending the arms, focus the mind in the space of the armpits. When the mind merges into that space, one attains peace & tranquillity. || 79

Casting an unmoving gaze upon a being with a physical form and making the mind free of thoughts & projections [about that being], one attains Śiva. || 80

#### HALFWAY POINT

Let the jaw go slack and the mouth open, with the tongue in the middle [pointing up] and cast awareness into the center. Doing *uccāra* of HA mentally, one will then dissolve into stillness. || 81

Situating oneself on a seat or a couch[, sitting or lying], imagine your body is without support (floating in space): when the mind dissolves, you become one who needs no external support(s). || 82

Situated on a swing or moving seat [such as a chariot, elephant, etc.], or through the body slowly being rocked [by oneself or by a friend], one's mental-emotional state becomes soothed & still, O Goddess, and one attains the Divine Flood [of Bliss]. || 83

Looking at the clear blue sky, with uninterrupted gaze, remaining completely still: all at once, O Goddess, one attains the 'form' of Bhairava. || 84

Imagine the entire sky as Bhairava, and that it is dissolved in your head [so your head is continuous with and has the same nature as the sky]. You will become completely permeated with the reality of the radiant energy that is Bhairava's nature. || 85

Having known the [three] states of 'universe' and so on – consisting of limited knowledge producing duality, illumination of the external, and darkness respectively – as the very form of Bhairava, he becomes one who carries within the infinite Light of Consciousness. || 86 NOTE: the Sanskrit commentaries are necessary to understand this verse. SEE ALSO *Paramārtha-sāra* 35 and commentary!

Similarly, on a dark & overcast moonless night, meditate on the formless 'form' of the darkness, and you will long for [and attain] Bhairava's formless form. || 87

In just the same way [on a dark night, see verse 87], first close your eyes [and behold] what looks like blackness in front of you; then opening them [and perceiving that same blackness in front of you],<sup>18</sup> contemplate it as the very form of Bhairava, and you will attain His nature. || 88

Whoever blocks or obstructs one [or more] of the sense-organs may enter into the nondual Void—exactly there [the true nature of] the Self manifests. || 89

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<sup>18</sup> It's also possible that the author envisions sitting in front of an actual Bhairava image (Kāla Bhairava), but the *evameva* would seem to mitigate against this.

A great [yogī] who repeats the phoneme ‘a’ without *anusvāra* or *visarga* [experiences] the sudden & powerful arising of the flood of insight that is identical with the Highest Divinity. || 90

Focus awareness on the end of the *visarga* sound of a [mantric] syllable that has a *visarga*; when the mind has become ‘supportless’, one may touch the eternal Absolute. || 91

(Note: Parā Devī’s *bīja-mantra* is clearly alluded to here.)

Meditate on the nature of the sky, unbounded & unconcealed in all directions, as identical to [the nature of] one’s own being. Then the Power of Awareness, which [like the sky] needs no external support, reveals your true nature. || 92

Having first pierced any part of the body with a sharp needle or the like, keep awareness focused on that very point, and the pure path to Bhairava [is revealed]. || 93

... [for v. 94-95 see below]

Observing (*avalokya*) a desire suddenly arising, one should lead it to quiescence. It will dissolve into the very ‘place’ from which it arose. || 96

... [for vv. 97-100 see below] ...

When in the field of craving, anger, greed, confusion, intoxicated excitement, or jealousy, make the mind still & soft [right in the middle of the emotion]: reality is that which remains [when the feeling has passed through]. || 101 (cf. v. 103)

## CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES

Contemplate thus: “There is no ‘mental apparatus’ within me, consisting of the mind, ego, etc.”—through the absence of mental constructs [of selfhood based on ephemeral mental operations], one becomes free of such constructs. || 94

Māyā (the Divine’s power of self-concealment-in-plurality) is indeed bewildering; She is established as that which effects (*kalana*) the limited powers (*kalā*) of the embodied self. Knowing (*kalayan*) the primordial property (*ādi-dharma*) of the Principles of Reality, one will no longer experience separation. || 95 [coded references to Kālī!]<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Abhinavagupta: “The meanings of the verbal root *√kal* (denoting the functions whence their names derive) are to go, to project, to know, to enumerate, to enjoy, to resonate, and to merge (something) in oneself.”

“When neither desire nor thought arise, who am I? Truly, I am just as I actually am.” Having realized oneself in this way, one’s mind becomes one with That [essence-nature] and merges into That. || 97

Or, when desire and/or thought do arise, one should focus the mind [on the energy of that desire or thought] and let consciousness be unwavering in considering that energy as [an essential *śakti* of] the Self. Then one will gain insight into the true nature of reality. || 98

Cognitions arise without cause and without objective basis, their nature being [merely] an eddy [of mental energy]. In reality, these [cognitions] belong to no one. One who directly senses the truth of this is Śiva [himself]. || 99

The One who has awareness as his fundamental attribute exists in all bodies; and awareness [as such] is the same in all beings. Thus, a person who contemplates everything as having that [Divine] nature overcomes [the false appearances of] mundane existence. || 100

When in the field of craving, anger, greed, confusion, intoxicated excitement, or jealousy, make the mind still & soft [right in the middle of the emotion]: reality is that which remains [when the feeling has passed through]. || 101

Contemplating the diverse universe as being similar to a magic show, or a wondrous painting, or as [constantly] in flux—seeing everything [in this way], the arising of [true] happiness occurs. || 102

Do not abandon the heart-mind to either suffering or happiness, O Bhairavī! In the Center is that reality which remains: let it be known. || 103

Letting go of body-consciousness, and contemplating “I am everywhere” with firm mind and unwavering viewpoint, one becomes happy. || 104

“Consciousness, Will, and so on are not only in me, but are in everything, including inanimate objects.” Contemplating in this way that everything manifest is manifest everywhere, one [experiences oneself] as all-pervasive. || 105



The awareness of knower and known is common to all embodied beings, but for yogīs there is this difference: they pay careful attention to the connection. || 106

Cultivate the felt-sense that the consciousness in another's body is the same as one's own. Releasing obsession with one's own body, one experiences one's all-pervasiveness within days. || 107

Making the mind supportless, one should not assemble mental constructs. O doe-eyed goddess, [the state called] Bhairava is that of [experiencing] the supreme Self in oneself. || 108

## TWO-THIRDS POINT

“The Highest Divinity is omniscient, omnipotent, and all-pervading; and I am he who possesses Śiva's qualities.” Stabilizing this conviction, one becomes Śiva. || 109

“Just as waves [arise] from water, undulating flames from fire, and light-rays from the sun, the various kinds of ‘waves’ of the universe arise from me, Bhairava.” || 110

## MORE DAILY LIFE PRACTICES

Whirling quickly around and around with the body and then falling to the ground, by the cessation of the power of excitation, the Supreme State arises. || 111

Through incapacity regarding the loci (*ādhāras*), or through the dissolution of the mind due to unknowing, [then,] at the end of the excitation of absorption in energy produced [by trying to figure it out], Bhairava-nature [is revealed]. || 112

O goddess, listen to this traditional teaching: I will speak it accurately. For one whose eyes are unmoving, radical freedom can arise in a moment. || 113

Closing the ears and likewise the ‘lower gate’, meditating on [the sound] without vowel or consonant [? *ahala*], one may enter the eternal Absolute. || 114 CHECK

Standing above a deep well, chasm, or the like and gazing into it, one's mind becomes completely free of thought, and suddenly dissolves into clarity. || 115

Wherever the mind goes, externally or even internally, it [discovers] nothing but the state of Śiva. Since [that state] is all-pervasive, where else could the mind go? || 116

Wherever [and whenever] the Consciousness of the all-pervasive Lord is manifested through the pathway of the eyes [or other senses], then, because it is that [very Consciousness] which [actually] possesses the qualities of the [apparently objective] perceptible [such as sound, sensation, color etc.], it dissolves into [pure] Awareness; then the state of the fulfilled self [arises]. || 117

⇒ Just before or after a sneeze, at the onset or cessation of anger,<sup>20</sup> in fear, in deep sorrow, when fleeing from conflict (or from joy),<sup>21</sup> in curiosity or wonder, at the onset and cessation of hunger: [in all these states and more], the state replete with Being of the Absolute [is available]. || 118

When seeing a place [one has been before], let go of things that arise in the memory, and let your body be 'supportless': [then] the Lord appears. || 119

Fix the gaze on some object, then slowly withdraw it, then the cognitive impression of it, then the heart-mind [itself]: O Goddess, one [who practices this] becomes an abode of spaciousness (*śūnya*). || 120

The understanding that arises in one who is transparent & unattached by virtue of his or her intense devotion is itself Śiva's *śakti*. Contemplate & meditate on it constantly: then, Śiva [manifests in one's direct experience]. || 121 (cf. v. 20)

When another object is being perceived, the emptiness in all things [may be perceived]. Meditating on that emptiness alone, though [the object] is still perceived, one settles down & becomes peaceful. || 122

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<sup>20</sup> Incorporating both alternate readings: *k.sutādyante* and *krodhādyante*

<sup>21</sup> Taking *ra.na* in both of its main senses.

## MORE CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES

That which people of paltry understanding consider ‘purity’ is impurity in the teachings of Śiva. [In truth,] there is neither purity nor impurity. Therefore, be free of such mental constructs, and be happy. || 123

The being/state called Bhairava is everywhere; [thus,] it is available to common folk as well. There is no ‘other’, nothing is separable from That—one who comprehends this is in the nondual mode. || 124

Knowing that because the total plenitude of the Absolute [is the same in all beings], [it makes sense to be] equal towards foe and friend, and equanimous in both honor and dishonor, one becomes [truly] happy. || 125

One should cultivate neither hatred nor craving in any circumstance. In one who is freed from attachment and aversion, the Absolute unfolds in the Center. || 126

## BECOMING ONE WITH BHAIRAVA

That which cannot be known [in the ordinary manner], that which cannot be grasped [by the mind], which is Void and abides in Nonbeing—that should be contemplated as Bhairava, as everything. At the culmination [of that contemplative process] comes the arising of awakened awareness. || 127

Absorbing the mind in external space—which is eternal, needs no support, void, all-pervasive, and free of limitations—one becomes completely immersed in spacelessness. || 128 [CHECK]

Wherever the mind goes, in that very instant let it abandon whatever [it has alighted upon]. Due to having nothing to hang on to, it then becomes ‘waveless’. || 129 (cf. verse 139!)

*bhriyāt/bhayā/bhiyā sarva.m racayati/ravayati sarvado/-go vyāpako 'khile /  
iti bhairava-śabdasya santatocāra.nāc chiva.h* || (this verse has variant readings)  
One who constantly utters (*uccāra.na*) the word ‘Bhairava’, understanding that it means “That which supports (BH.R) everything, that which produces (RAc) everything, which grants all [blessings] and pervades (VyĀp) the whole”, becomes Śiva. || 130

OR . . . it means “By His radiant Light (BHĀ), he makes the whole universe resound (RAV) . . .” OR . . . it means “Out of fear, he makes the whole universe roar . . .”

In everyday life, when one hears oneself saying phrases like ‘I am . . .’ or ‘this is mine’, seize the opportunity to inquire into what these words (‘I’ or ‘my’) refer to. The mind tries to find a referent, but it cannot. Impelled [toward the truth] by this meditative contemplation, one becomes peaceful. || 131

## FINAL PRACTICES

“Eternal, majestic, requiring no external support, all-pervasive, and Lord of All”—meditating on these words [as applying equally to God and to oneself] every possible moment, one attains the goal in accordance with their meaning. || 132

“It is established that this entire [universe] is as unreal as a magic show. How much reality is there in a magic show?” Due to being firm [in cultivating this conviction], one attains peace. || 133

How can the unchanging Self be the locus of cognition or action? [Yet all] external states (*bahir-bhāvas*) depend on cognition. Hence, this world is empty. || 134 [CHECK]

“For me there is no bondage; nor is there any [need for] liberation. These are merely [concepts] with which people frighten themselves. This [world] is [merely] a reflection in the [universal] mind, like the sun on [the surface of] the water.” || 135  
(Note: Abh. comments on this!)

Note: 135 is the final practice verse if we take verse 139 as enumerating 112 practice verses (as opposed to 112 *yuktis*).

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## CONCLUDING TEACHINGS

Here are the **concluding verses** of the text, which sum up its purpose and spiritual View. Yet these verses also take the opportunity to provide yet more instructions for contemplation and subtle practice through the reinterpretation of the fundamental practices of the mainstream religion.

Union with pleasure, pain, and so on always occurs through the doors of perception. With this in mind, let go [of attachment to] the senses and be at ease in the natural state (*svastha*), abiding in oneself. || 136

Everything is revealed by insight (or consciousness), and the self is revealed by everything. Due to there being only one essential nature, knowables are [to be] contemplated as [consisting of] One Consciousness. || 137<sup>22</sup>

O dear one, when these four—mental [states], individuated consciousness, power, and the self have dissolved [into unity], that is Bhairava-nature. || 138

O Goddess, I have taught 112 concise teachings on how become ‘waveless’. One who can understand them attains [true] wisdom. || 139

By ‘waveless’ (*nistarāṅga*), the author means internally still, free of mental and emotional agitation. This state of being ‘waveless’ is probably the same as that which Patañjali defines as ‘yoga’ in *Yoga-sūtra* 1.2. Jayaratha glosses it as *svātma-mātra-viśrāntī śānta-rūpā* (ad TĀ 3.5)

A practitioner who is [fully] connected (*yukta*) to even one [of these methods] becomes Bhairava himself. S/he performs actions by the [power of his] word, effecting both curses and blessings. || 140

He enters the state free from [fear of] old age and death, and is endowed with the qualities of ‘atomism’ and the rest. He is beloved of the yoginīs and presides over all the *melāpas*. Though still in the body, he is fully liberated even as he goes about his daily life. || 141-142ab

#### RECAP OF THE VIEW

*The Goddess said:*

If, O Lord, this is the true form of Parā, how can there be mantra or its repetition in the [nondual] state you have taught? What would be visualized, what worshipped and gratified? And who is there to receive offerings? || 142c-144b

*The revered Bhairava replied:*

In this [higher way], O doe-eyed woman, external procedures are considered coarse & superficial (*sthūla*). Here ‘japa’ is ever greater meditative absorption (*bhāvanā*) into the supreme state; and similarly, here the ‘mantra’ to be repeated is the spontaneous resonance [of self-awareness], which is the soul of all mantras. || 144c-145

As for ‘meditative visualization’ (*dhyāna*), it is a mind that has become motionless, free of forms, and supportless, not imagining a deity with a body, eyes, face and so on. || 146

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<sup>22</sup> Alternate reading (SLJ): “Consciousness is the illuminator in this world, and the Self is [also taught as] the illuminator. Since there is no difference between them, the Knower is [to be] contemplated in [and as] consciousness.”

*Pūjā* is likewise not the offering of flowers and so on. A mind made firm, that through careful attention dissolves into the thought-free ultimate void [of pure awareness]: that is *pūjā*. || 147

When one is connected to [even] one of the practices given here, the aspect of Bhairava called ‘nourished fullness’ (*bharita*) will arise and develop day by day: it is absolute wholeness, it is contentment. || 148

Offering the elements, the senses, and their objects, together with the mind, into the ‘fire’ that is the abode of the Great Void, with consciousness as the ladle: that is *homa*. || 149

Sacrifice (*yāga*) is the gratification characterized by innate joy. Starving (*kṣap*) all sins and [vowing to] save (*tra*) all beings, O Pārvatī, brings about the state of Immersion in the Power of God—and such immersion (*samāveśa*) is the true holy place (*kṣetra*), and the highest meditation. || 150-151b

Otherwise (i.e., without this inner realization), what worship could there be of that Reality, and whom would it gratify? | 151cd

In every way, the essence of one’s own self is simply Freedom, Joy, and Awareness (or: awareness of the joy of one’s innate freedom). Immersion into one’s essence-nature is here proclaimed as the true ‘purificatory bath’. || 152

The one who is worshipped with the various substances, the libations—higher and lower—which are poured, and the worshipper: all this is in reality One. How, then, [can we use the term] ‘worship’? || 153

The *prāṇa* goes out [on the exhale]; the life-force enters [on the inhale], and it forms into a coiled spring [of mantric energy] by [the power of] the will. That Great Goddess [Kuṇḍalinī] extends and lengthens [by the same power]. She is the highest place of ‘pilgrimage’, both transcendent and immanent. || 154

This key verse, with which the text comes full circle (compare v. 24), will need extensive commentary in my forthcoming book on the VBT (Mattamayūra Press, 2020).

Pursuing Her until one abides within Her in the ‘sacrificial rite’ consisting of supreme delight (*mahānanda*), one who is penetrated & permeated (*samāviṣṭa*) by that Goddess attains supreme Bhairava. || 155

This verse may or may not allude to the esoteric sexual ritual described in chapter 29 of the *Tantrāloka*, but either way the key here is that the yogī must be penetrated, permeated, and even

‘possessed’ (for the word *samāviṣṭa* means all of these) by Goddess Kuṇḍalinī in order to attain Supreme Bhairava.<sup>23</sup>

The *japa* of the Goddess goes on 21,600 times in each day and night, it is taught. This practice is easily mastered by some, but difficult to attain for those who are dense. || 156

This verse refers to the natural breath cycle, which takes about four seconds, and thus happens 21,600 times in a 24-hour period. The breath itself is the natural mantra of the Goddess. Here again the text comes full circle—see verse 24.

Thus, O Goddess, I have related to you the ultimate supreme nectar [of the Tantrik teachings]. It should never be given to someone who is a disciple of another (i.e., non-Tantrik) tradition, or who is cruel or mean-spirited, or who is not devoted to his or her teachers. || 157-158b

But it should be given without hesitation to those ‘heroes’ (= Kaula practitioners) of elevated nature, whose minds are [relatively] free of projections & dualistic views (*nirvikalpa*), and who are devoted to all their teachers. || 158c-159b

Village, kingdom, city, country, son, daughter, family (*ku.tumbaka*)—relinquishing [attachment] to all these, this [teaching] is to be taken up, O doe-eyed woman. || 159c-160b

O goddess, what is the point of impermanent things? [Only] this supreme wealth is permanent. One should sooner give up one’s own life than give this Supreme Nectar [to one not ready to comprehend it]. || 160c-161b

*The blessed Goddess said:*

“O God of gods! O great Lord! I am completely satisfied, O Śankara. Now I have learned the essence of the *Rudrayāmala-tantra*; now I understand the very heart of all the various kinds of energy (*śakti*).” || 161c-162b

Having spoken thus, delighted, the Goddess flung her arms about Shiva’s neck. || 162cd [CHECK numbering!]

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<sup>23</sup> Apocryphal verse 155b: *sakarena bahir yati hakarena viset punah | hamsahamsety amum mantram jivo japati nityasah* ||; “With the sound *sa* it goes forth; with the sound *ha* it enters in again. A living being always repeats this mantra – *hamsa, hamsa* – [in the form of the breath].”